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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9826
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6768
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 4829
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3470
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0534
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3562
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2639
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7337
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5071
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1739
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000140

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: ARMY COMMANDER CONSIDERS CLEARING
TIGERS FROM THE EAST

REF: A. COLOMBO 134

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 127

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Ambassador Blake met with Army Commander Major General Sarath Fonseka on January 23 following the Sri Lanka Army's (SLA) victory in the eastern Tiger (LTTE) strong hold of Vakarai (ref B). Fonseka estimated that the LTTE had been significantly weakened by two and a half months of combat in the east but that the LTTE might launch an offensive in the north, toward Jaffna. The Ambassador urged military restraint in support of the peace process and the development of a culture of human rights accountability within Sri Lanka's increasingly engaged military. Fonseka projected that resettlement of civilians in Vakarai could begin in a matter of weeks. End summary.

Victory at Vakarai

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador met with Army Commander Major General Sarath Fonseka on January 23 following the Sri Lanka Army's (SLA) victory in the eastern Tiger (LTTE) strong hold of Vakarai (ref B). Fonseka estimated that the SLA had killed over 500 Tiger cadres in two and a half months of combat and that the LTTE had been significantly weakened in the east. Air raids had killed several key LTTE commanders, such as elite forces leader "Veeman." Tiger cadres left heavy weapons, ammunition and vehicles as they fled Vakarai into jungle areas. In the coming months the SLA would remove several hundred LTTE cadres that remain in the Topagala jungle near Trincomalee, he said.

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador noted the importance of resettling the displaced persons from the Vakarai areas as soon as possible and inquired what the Army's plans were. Fonseka agreed this was important. He said the Army would need to undertake some demining first, but suggested that resettlement would begin in as little as two to three weeks. Ambassador asked if this included the IDPs from ampur. Fonseka said it did, with the

exception of those from the villages immediately south of the Trincomalee harbor, where the GSL intends to establish a Special Economic Zone.

14. (C) The Army commander speculated that the LTTE might launch an offensive in the north, toward Jaffna, Mannar or Vavuniya. The Tigers would have to "sacrifice 100 cadres" of "1500 to 2000" remaining island-wide in order to take Jaffna: "The LTTE will want a breakthrough in the North, but Prabhakaran will think twice about it; he will not be able to maintain control of Jaffna." The Army Commander did not rule out a security forces campaign in the North, where Prabhakaran "is preparing human shields" by stopping 350,000 civilians from leaving Kilinochchi and the rest of the Tiger-controlled "Vanni."

"LTTE Under Pressure,
Exercise Restraint"

15. (C) Fonseka speculated that LTTE would continue to seek VIP and economic targets in Colombo "to try to press the GSL into peace talks. But the GSL is already talking about peace talks," he said, smiling. Ambassador Blake reiterated the United States support for the GSL's fight against terrorism but stressed: "We hope that to the greatest extent possible you will exercise restraint since our primary strategic objection is to encourage a resumption of sustained peace talks on the basis of a credible devolution proposal." The Ambassador added: "The LTTE is under pressure. They know the situation in Jaffna is getting better."

Military Offensive for Peace

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16. (C) Ambassador noted to Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona during a January 22 meeting (ref A) the military's recent gains in Vakarai and elsewhere in the east (ref B) and inquired whether the military campaign would continue to the North. Kohona answered: "Military offensives should be seen in the context of putting pressure on LTTE supporters to understand that a victory on the battlefield is not possible.

There is no military solution nor any plan to pursue an offensive in the north. It is far better to return to the negotiating table." He added that the GSL was planning livelihoods and development projects in the North and East in order to win the hearts and minds of predominantly Tamil civilians. The GSL remained very much committed, he said, to the successful outcome of the All Party Representative Committee process and a political solution to the conflict.

No Choice But to
Respect Human Rights

17. (C) Reiterating a message he shared with the Foreign Secretary, the Ambassador stressed to Army General Fonseka

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that when members of the security forces commit human rights abuses, "It is important that they be punished. It would be helpful if you could tell us about these measures, even privately. My government is concerned that it appears that people are never punished." He added that abductions and killings after curfew in Jaffna, which the public understandably ties to the security forces or protected paramilitaries, "erase the good will" of the government's efforts to provide food and supplies to civilians.

18. (C) Fonseka replied, "Everyone is concerned with human rights. The security forces have been warned and they know they have no choice" but to comply with human rights guidelines. The SLA "tries not to interfere in police investigations. On a professional level, we have warned our

troops, but we can't take them to court for firing on civilians" in the course of battle.

19. (C) COMMENT: Emboldened by yet another military victory, the military and the Foreign Secretary believe they can use war to entice the Tigers to accept a hypothetical political solution not yet on offer from a consensus of southern parties. It was encouraging that Fonseka and Kohona both implied that the GSL would not undertake a military offensive in the north now that Vakarai is over. General Fonseka and Foreign Secretary Kohona seem to have heard our human rights message and that of other members of the international community, a message we hope that they will bear in mind as they undoubtedly continue a military campaign against the LTTE.
BLAKE